

New Welfare Reforms Passed After Years Of Deliberation

The 1996 welfare reform law made dramatic changes to the nation's welfare programs. As a result, welfare dependence was cut by more than half as more low-income parents went to work to support their families. To ensure later Congresses would make sure reforms were working as intended, the authors of the 1996 law extended the reforms only through September 2002.

Congress spent 2002-2005 deciding how best to build on the 1996 reforms.

Culminating in welfare reforms included in the conference agreement on the *Deficit Reduction Act of 2005* (P.L. 109-171), this period of deliberation included:

1. *Repeated passage of comprehensive welfare reauthorization bills.* Three major welfare reform bills were debated and passed on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives in 2002, 2003, and 2005. (The Senate's failure to act on these bills resulted in repeated extensions of current law; see below.)
 - a. H.R. 4737, the *Personal Responsibility, Work, and Family Promotion Act of 2002*, passed the House 229-197 on May 16, 2002.
 - b. H.R. 4, the *Personal Responsibility, Work, and Family Promotion Act of 2003*, passed the House 230-192 on February 13, 2003.
 - c. H.R. 4241, including the *Work, Marriage, and Family Promotion Reconciliation Act of 2005*, passed the House 217-215 on November 18, 2005.
2. *Dozens of hearings involving hundreds of witnesses.* In researching these proposals, the House Committee on Ways and Means alone held 21 separate hearings. One hearing included 47 witnesses, representing any group that asked to testify.
3. *Passage of 12 short-term extensions of current law, permitting further consideration of next steps.* While awaiting final action on the next stage of reform, Congress passed and the President signed a dozen three and six-month extensions of current welfare programs, covering the period between September 30, 2002 and March 31, 2006.